

PROPOSALS FOR THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONGRESS OF THE APPO

INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN OAXACA
Saturday, November 11, 2006.

“And the old vulture lies in wait, high on his rock. He fixes his bloodshot eye on the advancing giant, still unaware of the causes of the insurrection. Tyrants don’t understand the right to rebellion.” (From *Regeneración*, September 10, 1910.)

THE NATIONAL AND STATE CONTEXT

Recent political events like the approval of the “Televisa law,” the vote fraud in the presidential election, and the refusal of the national Senate to declare the removal of the powers that be in the state of Oaxaca, all confirm a tendency that has grown stronger over at least three decades on the part of the government and both national and international economic power groups. Needless to say, the mainstream media, with some honorable exceptions, have been all too willing to impose their vision and continue to manipulate public opinion.

In this context, the struggle that we’re now waging in Oaxaca was born among our communities, peoples, organizations, students, tenant farmers, unions, and NGOs. Now, nobody can make us believe that there’s the least bit of compassion or justice in the rulers. We’re convinced that they’re only driven by their quest for power and money. But, here below, we’ve also learned that the people’s cry for justice and freedom is perpetual and that it cannot be silenced, not even by the tyrant’s murderous bullets.

Today we are not only struggling against a local tyrant, but against an entire system, which for many years has implanted its political and economic structures and continues to import external cultural forms in order to dominate us. Thus, all the repression and low intensity warfare that we’re experiencing in the state and in the country as a whole stem from the confrontation between two projects: that of the oppressors and that of the oppressed, our project. We are resisting the demand to turn over our wealth to a few people and to become modern slaves in the new exploitation centers, the *maquiladoras*, or to become the muleteers of our natural resources. We are resisting the loss of our culture, of being governed by a gang of thieves that utilize power in their own self-interest and to serve those who keep us in dire poverty.

We also remind you that it’s not only the powerful who are responsible for our situation, but also we, the oppressed people, who have let them have their way for many years, many decades, who have let those who degrade us stay in power. In other words, we’ve often elected our own executioners or have sold our dignity for a plate of lentils. And they’ve used our poverty to throw us a few crumbs. Our people have lived for too many years in this system that reduces us to beggars.

THE POPULAR MOVEMENT OF OAXACA

In the face of this state and national reality, it's important to understand that for the large majority of the indigenous and mestizo men and women of Oaxaca, for the peons, workers, teachers, students, youth and children with no possibilities for work or study, women who support entire families in the worst possible conditions, small businessmen, tenant farmers, and thousands of migrants, an in-depth transformation of our state is a matter of life or death; it's a question of survival for current and future generations.

The powerful are astounded that we are willing to go to jail, as if the conditions of life here are not themselves a kind of jail.

They are astounded that we are willing to die at the barricades, as if they haven't killed us in worse ways. They are astounded that we are willing to lose our salaries, jobs, and scholarships, as if they weren't planning to take them away from us (as a matter of fact, many of us don't have them anyway). They're astounded that we're willing to keep from opening the schools, as if education mattered to the regime's mafia bosses and to the parasites in corrupt bureaucratic circles. They're astounded that we're willing to sacrifice so much, to do so much organized volunteer work, to stay up all night long so many nights, to endure hunger, as if we weren't used to it. Our resistance is our weapon, and they couldn't deal with it and they never will.

For these reasons, the movement in Oaxaca is not a spontaneous outbreak, but a necessary, inevitable struggle that's been anticipated and prepared for in a thousand ways by countless peoples and organizations. For the Indian Peoples—and the majority of the teachers belong to them—today's movement didn't begin on May 22 or on June 14, 2006. For years we've confronted this authoritarian regime and have been pursued, jailed, and killed for doing so. The brutal onslaught of Ulises Ruiz's un-government began against the organized indigenous peoples. The political prisoners of the COMPA and the Promotora-Oaxaca, including the prisoners of our organization OIDHO, were the first victims of the fascist methods of this regime. Here, we only wish to recall the criminal, unpunished attacks with firearms by PRI authorities and police forces against the *tequios* (communal work projects), community assemblies, and local organizations in Santiago Xanica, San Miguel Panixtlahuaca, and Santiago Cuixtla. Other organizations will recall more nefarious deeds. The repression began against those of us who pushed for the construction of broad-based alliances between social and civilian organizations and trade unions. Above all, it was directed against those of us who are adherents to the Other Campaign. On May 22, it wasn't only the teachers who set up the encampment, but all the organizations in the Promotora-Oaxaca, of which Section 22 is a part.

With the repression of June 14, the process of struggle was accelerated and broadened. Hundreds of thousands of people came together in marches, blockades, and barricades, and we began the construction of this movement's most important achievement: the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, the APPO, an undivided, democratic space of this exemplary 21st century struggle.

THE POPULAR ASSEMBLY OF THE PEOPLES OF OAXACA - APPO

The mass disinformation media have intentionally set about personalizing, minimizing, slandering, and criminalizing the APPO because, for the classes that hold power, those of us who have created this organizational form are their greatest fear. We don't lend ourselves to their cooptation strategies and we don't give in to economic offers or threats of repression. It's precisely because we don't give in that they call us intransigent. We're peaceful, not passive; we're plural and autonomous, yet united; we're from the base, not leaders or vanguards. We're combining centuries of indigenous organizational experience with strategies of modern social movements. This has sustained us for almost six months and has won us respect from far beyond our borders. And this is what we have to strengthen and consolidate.

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE APPO

We now have at least three challenges: the most important is the need for unity in the movement. Without this, it is impossible to meet the other two, which are first, to adopt the structures that have been utilized by our peoples since time immemorial so that personal interests can't steamroll over collective needs and interests, and, second, to adopt a viable project that includes the thinking of everyone seeking real change in our state and our country.

To consolidate our organization as the APPO, we need to take on even more grassroots work, or work with our membership bases, for several different reasons that we'll outline. First, due to the critical nature of the period that we've experienced in recent days, it hasn't been possible to engage in deep reflection on the issues that we thought it was necessary to discuss. To say that the proposals that we're presenting here come from below would be somewhat deceptive. It's necessary that we end this congress with a minimal document that will allow us to keep doing grassroots work.

It's urgent that we join together in our efforts, and in order to strengthen our organizational form, the APPO, we make the following proposals:

THE BASES (FROM THE GROUND UP): Taking into consideration that in each community (whether it's called a municipal agency, ranching village, neighborhood, or simply a community) there's a teacher working and that many of us have organizations in these same places, let's agree to call a local meeting of the APPO on a certain date, then a municipal meeting, then a district or regional meeting, leading up to another statewide APPO meeting. In other words, we'll be building up what we have, multiplying it. Then right here we'll be able to delegate responsibilities to see that the work is carried out effectively. We should always keep in mind that our timetable is not the timetable of the system or the government. Neither is this true of our practice; we work from below and from the left.

COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP: The APPO and its Council should never be trampolines for political careers in rotten institutions. Here, we're going to struggle for a new Constitutional Congress and a new Constitution. We're not going to play at being legislators. Those who have come here to boast of their role in struggles that they have nothing to do with, or to impose ideologies, political party strategies, or power bases for certain leaders, have not understood that the political force of the APPO resides

precisely in the autonomous collective decisions of the bases and in the strict obedience of the chosen leaders to the mandates of the assemblies. They haven't understood why compañeros died in the communities and at the barricades.

For these reasons it's important for the Popular Council of the APPO not to adopt any kind of vertical structure and for the **service** that its members give to the collective whole to be rotational, revocable and representative of real struggles, not of entrenched leaders or those who spout empty words. The Council should include political prisoners and ex-political prisoners with a history of struggle.

INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION: Oaxaca is a state with a majority indigenous population, and this has to be reflected in the APPO and its Council, just as it's been reflected in the struggle. But we, as indigenous people in the struggle, venture to say that we are talking about representatives of real indigenous struggles who have participated collectively with a high degree of organization in this process. We're not talking about those perennial "well-known indigenous personalities" who don't represent anyone besides themselves and who love to make a folkloric appearance in the forums and news media.

WOMEN: At this stage of the movement, we are all aware that the Oaxacan women have conclusively shown that no struggle will be possible without them. We think that they should not only be taken into account with respect to organizational work and actions, but also—and in equitable numbers—in all the representational and decision-making spaces such as the APPO and its commissions.

STRUCTURE AND PRINCIPLES

We're now a national reference point, in which leaders and directors are no longer the ones who are guiding the movement. Today we can speak of an authentic struggle of the people and we're proud of that. Structures exist that prevented our movement from being aborted. We know that as long as our people are the ones who sustain and vitalize our movement and organization, the prisons and the murderous bullets of the tyrant won't be able to destroy this struggle that's been incubated in our people.

For these reasons what we now need, above all, is political ethics as a norm, the collective for making decisions, and legitimate representatives for implementing them. We have to create the conditions and structures so that those who wish to utilize our movement for their own interests won't be able to do so because our initiatives will deter any efforts to utilize the movement. We should bear in mind that we're now constructing such a structure and believe that the teachers' state assembly is a good experience from which to learn. Let's perfect it, taking away its vertical structure and relying on both new and millenary libertarian, autonomous forms of organization. Today we know exactly what we shouldn't do and that is to take part in the vile practices of the political system and its allies. We must earnestly seek a new way of conducting politics.

The APPO now has the ability to change the correlation of forces in favor of the people because it **is** the people themselves. It can't betray itself. We must understand that. That's why we must all be heard. We can't build anything if not through consensus. That does NOT mean voting and following the will of the majority. It means looking for

a solution that we all agree with. Our program should be based on NEVER AGAIN MAKING DECISIONS WITHOUT CONSULTING THE PEOPLE.

INTEGRAL REFORM OF THE FREE, SOVEREIGN STATE OF OAXACA

Our struggle also aspires to a project that has to do with a re-founding of the state, drawing on the millenary wisdom of our peoples. We must venture to make profound changes, not just to import doctrines and ideas that have been applied or that are being applied in other times and spaces that don't correspond to our unique situation, our culture, the development and practice of our peoples. Neither, however, should we be closed to more humane and more perfect forms, should one exist in the western system or any other system, but it should be based in freedom, justice, and dignity.

One of the most serious problems in our country today is the cult of personality, especially when it comes to our country's presidents or state governors. We must demystify these figures, who are often fascist and authoritarian like the one we are now dealing with in our state and those in other states throughout the country where the rulers are nothing more than criminals operating under the "state of law."

In order to take some steps towards demystification, the state government could be, first of all, collective, elected every three years or every six years. In case it were six years, the presidency of the collective would be filled by one of the six people for a one-year period. It would thereby be a presidency of a rotational collective serving a six year term. The salary of these governors would be no higher than what is required for a medium-level standard of living. This means that all six would earn less than a typical governor earns today.

Even though it's true that there's an urgent need for a comprehensive reform in our state and it's necessary to hold a new Constitutional Congress and create a new Constitution, it's also true that we have to start from below, with an in-depth consultation. That requires a discussion not only involving those of us who are here today; at the same time we must consult our communities, neighborhoods, unions, etc., just like we have done to elect our delegates. Likewise, we need a consultation that explains our reform agenda to the people with whom we work and of whom we are a part.

PLATFORM OF STRUGGLE

We've initiated a process in which we've exposed the ways in which political power is responsible for all kinds of abuses against those who are struggling for their most basic rights. Today in Oaxaca, nobody is fooled, except those who still want to live in a system where we beg for crumbs. And those who receive the lion's share of these handouts and have a vested interest in the system continue to dole out a few pesos for food and other goods to the people, as if this were a solution to poverty.

We know that economic change in our state and our country won't happen if we, those from below, aren't able to generate our own projects, whether we call them productive, economic, etc. In other words, we must be self-managing, but in order to carry out these economic processes we must be able—all together and in unison—to take the power that is ours and to achieve a deep political, economic, and social transformation.

Today we think of the compañeros who've been killed, disappeared, tortured, and wounded by the repressive forces in this struggle.

Today the jails are full of political prisoners. They release five compañeros and jail twenty more. We're paying the price for demanding a deep change for our people. We know our struggle will demand more suffering, and so we can't abandon our principles halfway along the road without risking that more of our brothers and sisters will fill the jails. That's why our struggle has to continue until we live in complete freedom and, for this, we have to strengthen our organization.

Our primordial goal is to defend our natural and cultural resources. We can't allow government and business to take what doesn't belong to them, utilizing rotten institutions to justify their domination. For this reason, no single organization, community, union, etc. should confront the government in isolation. We must keep in mind that it is the government's aim to isolate us and destroy our movement.

Let's make sure that they aren't able to divide us into "moderates" and "radicals" either. We know that today in Oaxaca and Mexico, anyone who defends the legitimate rights of the people is a "radical" in the eyes of the powers that be, and anyone who they consider a "moderate" is so classified because of not daring to question injustice in depth and to act forcefully to transform the reality that we're enduring.

And one last commentary: We men and women of OIDHO, indigenous farmers and tenant farmers of the most marginalized areas of the state, are not interested in the power that concedes political positions; nor in "popular power" if its aim is to establish new vanguards and extol new leaders. The only thing that interests us is to construct, from the bottom and from the left, the organizational and collective power of the peoples of Oaxaca, autonomous in their decisions, but united in their struggle, which is the struggle of all of us men and women who have decided to free ourselves from 21st century slavery. No to alliances with political parties, with or without registration.

We welcome all alliances with organizations and movements that share our struggle, respecting our identity and our autonomy.

LONG LIVE THE PEOPLE OF OAXACA!

LONG LIVE THE APPO!

LONG LIVE THE PEOPLE OF MÉXICO!

FREEDOM FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS!

No More Repression and Misery among the Indigenous Peoples!

Victory Goes not to the Most Powerful, but to the Best Organized!

Santa María Atzompa, Oaxaca, November 9, 2006

OIDHO